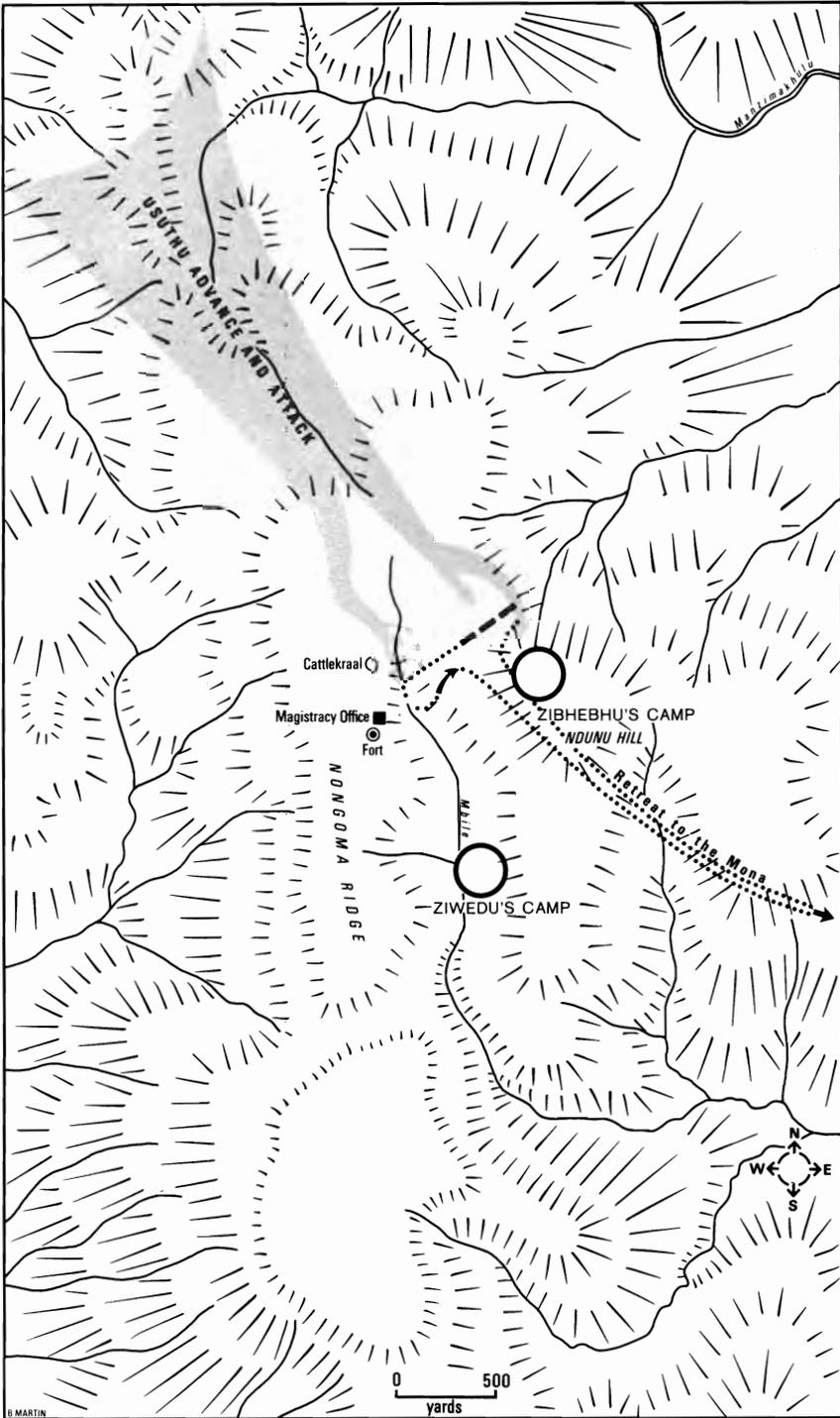


The Battle of Ivuna

(or Ndunu Hill)

Of the many battles fought in Zululand during the second half of the nineteenth century, the engagement of 23 June 1888 was one of the most singular. It was fought between the Usuthu adherents of Dinuzulu and their rival Mandlakazi under Zibhebhu, and embroiled a force of Zululand Police garrisoning Mr Addison's magisterial post of Ivuna, situated in what is now the middle of the little town of Nongoma in north-western KwaZulu.

Britain had formally annexed Zululand in May 1887, and for administrative purposes had divided it into six magisterial districts. Ndwandwe District, comprising the north-western segment of the new colony, had been allotted to Dick Addison, an experienced civil and police official, considered to have a close knowledge of the Zulu. It was potentially a most troublesome district, for there dwelt Dinuzulu kaCetshwayo, the son of the last Zulu king, with the bulk of his adherents known as the Usuthu. From the outset, Dinuzulu had shown dissatisfaction with his reduced status in a British Zululand, and his recalcitrant behaviour had prompted the Governor Sir Arthur Havelock and Melmoth Osborn, the Resident Commissioner of Zululand, to resort to a disastrous expedient. They had decided to return Zibhebhu kaMaphitha and his adherents, the Mandlakazi, to Ndwandwe whence in 1884 they had been driven by the Usuthu in the final act of the civil wars that had riven Zululand following Britain's dismantling of the old kingdom in 1879, and her subsequent failure to take immediate responsibility for what she had brought about. Havelock and Osborn hoped that the near presence of their traditional foes would act as a natural check on Usuthu truculence towards the colonial authorities. In one sense, their decision to employ the Mandlakazi was a rational one, for, since the middle of 1879, Zibhebhu had proved himself the most steadfast of collaborators with the British, and Addison's small police force was clearly unequal to the task of curbing the Usuthu. Yet in another, it was extremely short-sighted, for the civil wars had left a legacy of great bitterness between the Usuthu and Mandlakazi. Consequently, when the latter had returned to Ndwandwe under government auspices in late 1887, clearly thirsting to avenge their defeat of 1884 and loudly demanding the expulsion of those Usuthu who since then had settled on former Mandlakazi lands, the Usuthu had naturally been filled with alarm. Addison's open bias in favour of Zibhebhu, who had come, after all, as a stick with which he was to beat the Usuthu, had greatly increased their disquiet. Despairing of the situation, Dinuzulu and his adherents had retired in May 1888 to Ceza mountain, a traditional Usuthu fastness on the borders of Zululand and the Boer New Republic, some twenty miles south-west of Addison's post at Ivuna. By late June the authorities had been unsuccessful in their attempts to dislodge them, while for their part, the Usuthu had been engaged in raiding Zulus living in the vicinity whom they considered to be guilty of collaborating with the British.



The battle of Ivuna (or Ndunu Hill)



Dick Addison (left, with pointer), Commandant Mansel (centre) and a detachment of the Reserve Territory Carbineers (later the Zululand Police) c. 1886.

With grateful acknowledgment to the Natal Archives, Pietermaritzburg



Dinuzulu kaCetshwayo c. 1888.

With grateful acknowledgment to the Natal Archives, Pietermaritzburg



Zibhebhu kaMaphitha with one of his wives c. 1886.

With grateful acknowledgment to the Natal Archives, Pietermaritzburg

The government, meanwhile, had called in the assistance of Imperial troops, and a considerable force was now massing at Nkonjeni, 38 miles to the south of Ivuna, preparatory to a renewed offensive against the Usuthu. Part of the Ivuna garrison had gone to swell this concentration, and in their absence Osborn had ordered Zibhebhu and his fighting men to move up to Ivuna from their location in the eastern parts of the district in order to help protect the magisterial post. Under the guise of undertaking patrol work on the magistrate's orders, Zibhebhu had promptly made use of this opportunity to raid Usuthu sympathisers and personal enemies living in the vicinity of Ivuna. When word of these doings reached the Usuthu on Ceza, their leaders determined to launch an immediate surprise attack on Zibhebhu in order to settle with him and his Mandlakazi once and for all. Accordingly, just after dusk on 22 June, they set off with the entire armed force at Ceza on a night march towards Ivuna.

Zibhebhu had with him fifteen *amaviyo* ('companies'), or between seven and eight hundred men. They were encamped with a number of women and children in temporary shelters in the scrubby bush of the Ndunu hill, nine hundred yards to the east of Addison's post, which in turn was situated on the low range of the Nongoma hills. The marshy headwaters of a stream, the Mbile, ran through a deep, narrow valley between the two positions. On the lower slopes of the Ndunu hill, about half a mile south-west of Zibhebhu's camp, another large body of Zulu were encamped with their livestock. These were followers of Ziweddu kaMpande, whose nephew Dinuzulu had raided for co-operating with the authorities, and who had thought in consequence that they would be safer if they settled temporarily in the vicinity of the magisterial post and its garrison. Addison's post itself had been built to withstand an attack. At its core was a sturdy little earthwork fort thrown up by the Zululand Police. It had a diameter of fifteen yards, and its parapet was sandbagged and loopholed. Around it ran a wide, deep ditch. About fifty yards from the fort, and surrounding it, was a strong zereba of thorn-bushes. Between the ditch and the zereba Addison had almost completed the construction of a house, in which he had hoped his wife and children, then living in Eshowe, would soon be able to join him. A mess house and the Zululand Police huts were also within the enclosure, while the magistracy office itself was outside. The force actually garrisoning this post was not large, consisting of only fifty Zululand Police under the command of Sub-Inspector Jack Osborn (the Resident Commissioner's son), Dick Addison the magistrate, his clerk Cuthbert Foxon, three Imperial soldiers who operated the heliograph, a few local traders and transport riders, and a handful of court orderlies and messengers; yet considering that they all had to fit inside the fort, it was perhaps just as well that there were no more of them.

Mkhwezili Mangele, an adherent of Zibhebhu's, recounted in 1942 that the Usuthu force from Ceza bivouacked on the night of the 22 June some four miles from the Nongoma hills, and there prepared themselves for the coming battle. During the dead of night, when all was quiet, Zibhebhu's scouts heard Dinuzulu's men chanting their war-songs, and the Mandlakazi, as Mkhwezili recalled, in turn hastened to make themselves ready. Sadly, this romanticised version is contradicted by the testimony of Zimbube kaMaphitha, a brother of Zibhebhu's, whose account was taken down by the

magistrate stationed at Nongoma in 1935. Zimbube's story, which Mr Braatvedt checked for accuracy against the memories of other surviving veterans of the battle, also tallies substantially with the contemporary reports of the whites within the fort, and with the evidence of blacks engaged on either side. It would appear, in fact, that far from being fore-warned, Zibhebhu had neglected to post any sentries at all, as he had not anticipated an Usuthu attack. Consequently, when at five minutes to six on the morning of Saturday 23 June police sentries at the Ivuna camp gave the alarm that a large armed force was approaching from the north (the steep western flank of the Nongoma range seems to have dictated the direction of the Usuthu advance), the Mandlakazi were taken completely off their guard.

Through his spy-glass, Addison recognized the advancing *impi* from their distinctive *mshokobezi* (the white cow-tail decorations hanging from necks and elbows) as being an Usuthu force, and with the rest of the garrison and its hangers-on, precipitately abandoned the camp and took refuge within the fort. Within ten minutes of their first being sighted the Usuthu *impi*, between three or four thousand men strong, breasted the Nongoma ridge about 1 200 yards from the camp, and apparently undeterred by their long march and sleepless night, swept resolutely down towards the fort. To those watching apprehensively from behind its walls, they seemed to come on like a great half moon, and indeed, their battle formation was strictly traditional, with skirmishers to the front of the curving horns and a reserve in support. Their tactics were traditional too, and while the left horn, nearly three thousand strong, wheeled to the south-west and moved along the slope leading to Zibhebhu's camp, the smaller right horn, of about a thousand men, came on straight towards the fort.

On the Ndunu hill, Zibhebhu was doing all he could in the few minutes allowed him to form up his men to face the Usuthu onslaught. Numbers of them ran away at the first sight of the enemy, but the remainder of his badly-outnumbered force, all of whom wore a red ribbon around the neck or forehead which had been served out to them by Addison and which distinguished them as Native Levies in the government's service, responded manfully. In the centre, Zibhebhu drew up his best fighting men, the iNyomhlophe (white bird) *ibhutho* ('regiment'), flanked to left and right respectively by the elderly Ekuvukeni and Banganomo *amabutho* (regiments), named after two of Zibhebhu's principal homesteads. As the Mandlakazi moved to take up position before their camp, Zibhebhu rode before them on his white horse, encouraging them with his indomitable courage and contemptuous references to the Usuthu 'rabble', which he declared his men could chase off with their sticks alone. Neither side made a sound as they approached each other, but when at a distance of about 350 yards the Usuthu charged and the Mandlakazi ran to meet them, a terrific din broke out, with the Usuthu yelling their cry of *Usuthu!* and the Mandlakazi responding with their *Washesha!* Though the venerable Usuthu *induna* Hemulana kaMbanyezeli had devised the Usuthu strategy, Dinuzulu and his uncle Ndabuko kaMpande actively led the attack, assisted by three or four Boers from the New Republic, who had accompanied the *impi* as 'advisers'. These last were dressed in light coloured clothing with the *mshokobezi* in their hats, and by some reports had blackened their hands and faces in order not to be detected by the Ivuna garrison. Dinuzulu opened the Usuthu attack by leading

his force of thirty or forty horsemen against the iNyonemhlophe of the Mandlakazi centre, but these hurled stones and assegais at the horses, causing the force to recoil in complete confusion. The unmounted Usuthu uFaliza (chatterers) *ibutho* was in close support, however, followed by the imBokodwebomvu (red grindstone) and inGobamakhosi (bender of kings) *amabutho*, and immediately engaged the Mandlakazi in hand-to-hand fighting with the assegai. For a moment the Usuthu wavered and even fell back a few paces at the Mandlakazi's determined resistance, but their greatly superior numbers quickly told. The Ekuvukeni and Banganomo *amabutho* on the Mandlakazi flanks began to crumble, while in a classic manoeuvre the Usuthu imBokodwebomvu *ibutho* outflanked the Mandlakazi and took them from the rear. The shattered Mandlakazi flanks disintegrated, and were almost at once joined in their precipitate flight by the iNyonemhlophe of the centre, who could not alone sustain the overwhelming Usuthu attack.

While the Usuthu left horn engaged the Mandlakazi on Ndunu hill, their smaller right horn continued its advance on the fort. This horn was made up of the abaQulusi, close adherents of the Zulu Royal House who, as a result of the creation of the New Republic, were now subjects of the Boers. In his address before the battle, Dinuzulu had reminded them that their mission was to obliterate Zibhebhu, and not to fight the white people. The Usuthu strategy, however, which envisaged that the right horn would cut off the Mandlakazi line of retreat to the Ivuna camp, demanded that it pass close by the fort. This would bring it within easy range of the garrison, but Dinuzulu had strictly cautioned the abaQulusi not to retaliate, even if fired upon. The garrison were naturally not to know of these instructions, and were therefore taken by surprise when the abaQulusi, instead of launching the anticipated frontal attack on the fort, suddenly wheeled to their left about six hundred yards short of their presumed objective and set off in the direction of the battle now raging on Ndunu hill. Sub-Inspector Osborn, clearly hoping to prevent their joining in the unequal struggle against Zibhebhu, now ordered the Zululand Police to fire upon the abaQulusi as they changed front. The effect of their volley was to cause the abaQulusi to rush towards the cover of the narrow valley of the Mbile, yet without interfering with their primary objective, which was to get between the now flying Mandlakazi and the protection of the fort. In this they were most successful, for they intercepted and killed large numbers of the Mandlakazi in the bed of the Mbile stream and on the slope leading up to the fort. Only a handful managed to break through and gain the fort. One of these was Zimbube, who had the advantage of being mounted. After being momentarily stuck in the mud of the marshy Mbile, and having suffered an assegai wound, he managed to shake off his pursuers and gallop his horse up the Nongoma ridge to the fort. There it was promptly shot from under him by one of the panicky Zululand Police who had taken him for an enemy. Addison recognized Zimbube and shouted to the police to hold their fire, but another persisted in firing and shattered the butt of Zimbube's rifle. Understandably enraged at being fired upon by his allies after so narrowly running the gauntlet of Usuthu, Zimbube raised what was left of his weapon to retaliate in kind. Addison was too quick for him, however, and in a deft movement knocked up his gun, and seizing him by the throat, threw him over backwards with such effect, that all remaining fight was knocked out of him.

In the course of his flight towards the fort, Zimbube had come across Zibhebhu, heading down Ndunu hill in the same direction. But Zibhebhu, gauging that there was no hope of escape across the Mbile, mounted his horse and made good his escape in the opposite direction. Mkhwezile rather fancifully recounted that at one stage in his flight Zibhebhu, on being hotly pressed by his pursuers, covered himself with corpses in order to avoid detection. Be that as it may, most of his followers were forced by the presence of the Usuthu right horn along the Mbile to follow the direction of his flight. They were pursued by the enemy's left horn, including Dinuzulu on his little bay mare with the half-cut tail, out of sight of the fort, across the Mona river over five miles away, and as far as the Mangwana hill some way beyond.

The Usuthu did not confine themselves to the Mandlakazi, but having routed them, began to loot and burn their huts (in which activity the Boers among them took a prominent part), and then turned on Ziweudu's people, cowering in caves and holes near the Mbile stream on the lower slopes of the Ndunu hill. It was while parties of his men were rounding up these unfortunates' cattle and other livestock, that Dinuzulu ordered his mounted men to take up position on the rocky crest of Ndunu hill, whence they commenced a desultory and inaccurate fire on the fort. Their intention was apparently to discourage any hostile intervention from that quarter, and if Dinuzulu's charge is true, also to drive back a small party of mounted Zululand Police who had made a sortie and were 'finishing off' the abaQulusi lying wounded from the fire earlier directed at them from the fort.

Having rounded up a great herd of about 750 cattle, mainly from Ziweudu's people but including a number belonging to Zibhebhu, which they had found lower down the valley of the Mbile, as well as some from the Police cattle kraal 300 yards in front of the fort, the Usuthu re-formed. With their booty and prisoners (a number of captured Mandlakazi men, women and children), they began to retire along the ridge, coming under the fire of the Zululand Police all the while. Passing to the east of Ndunu hill, they only turned back in the direction of Ceza a mile north of the fort and out of its effective range.

At the outset of the battle Addison, who had supposed that the Mandlakazi would attempt to take refuge in the ditch surrounding the fort (which was itself too small to accommodate both them and the garrison), had ordered that the horses which were tethered there be cast loose. These had naturally galloped off in panic and the Usuthu had succeeded in capturing and riding off with seventeen of them, including two of Addison's own. One of Addison's, however, bolted back up the wagon road to the fort, and its new owner Makhunya, the *induna* of the abaQulusi, had little choice but to throw himself off at a full gallop rather than face Addison's retribution. A number of the Boers did set off after it, but coming under fire from the fort, gave up the chase. Addison, who had a great reputation as a horseman, was especially pleased to have it back, for his recovered cream-coloured horse was apparently a most valuable beast. He was less fortunate with his two dogs, a pointer and a greyhound, which, running loose at the time of the attack, had been caught and killed by the Usuthu.

Once it became apparent that the Usuthu were definitely retiring, Addison ordered out a mounted patrol of eight Zululand Police under Corporal Mathutha to ascertain in which direction they were headed. Mathutha and

his men followed in the *impi*'s wake along the ridge, occasionally dismounting and exchanging shots with its rearguard. An attempt by some Usuthu horsemen to take them from the rear was foiled by supporting fire from the fort. At length, the intrepid Police caught up with four *amaviyo* of the enemy, all on foot, who had lagged behind the main body as they were driving a herd of captured cattle before them. The nine Policemen charged them with determination, and the Usuthu fled without attempting to make a stand, abandoning their booty. As their ammunition was now running out, Mathutha decided to return to the fort with the recaptured cattle. On the way he set his men about collecting stray cattle in the dongas, and there they came across some eighty of Zibhebhu's and Ziweddu's women and a number of their children who had been sheltering there. Apart from these, Mathutha and his gallant men had succeeded in recapturing or rounding up about 200 head of cattle. They had failed, however, to regain any of the captured goats and sheep.

Despite the return of Mathutha's successful patrol, tension in the fort remained high, for the retiring *impi* hovered in sight until late afternoon, when it finally began to withdraw in the direction of Ceza. Until then the garrison had waited in increasing dismay, for Addison had doubted their ability to withstand the determined, full-scale attack on their position which the continued Usuthu presence had seemed to threaten.

The following morning, in response to Addison's alarming heliographs of the previous day, a column of Imperial troops and Zululand Police arrived from Nkonjeni to relieve the garrison. The grisly task of assessing the casualties suffered in the battle then commenced. No one from the Ivuna garrison had suffered the slightest hurt, but Zibhebhu's losses had been very heavy. He himself estimated these at 200 killed and between 50 and 60 wounded, though Commandant Mansel of the Zululand Police, after a careful examination of the field, put the Mandlakazi dead at nearer 300. Many of them were in his words 'terribly butchered', and lay heaped up in piles in the Mbile spruit where the abaQulusi had intercepted their flight. Mansel saw 40 men lying dead in one line on top of Ndunu hill where the main encounter had taken place, and counted more scattered along the line of the Mandlakazi rout towards the Mona river. Ziweddu's people had lost seven killed and one wounded. Not more than 25 to 30 Usuthu had been killed, and some of these were victims of the fire from the fort. On the 25 June, the Ivuna post, which in the circumstances the military authorities considered untenable, was abandoned, and its garrison (including Zibhebhu's surviving adherents, whom he had gathered together in the interim) were evacuated to Nkonjeni. Knowing that the abandoned post would inevitably be looted, Cuthbert Foxon, the magistrate's clerk, buried the valuables and documents that could not be taken with them in the ditch of the fort. And indeed, when Ivuna was re-established in August 1888 once the British had succeeded in finally defeating and dispersing the Usuthu, Addison found that his magistracy building had been wrecked, while his house, the mess and the Police huts within the zereba had all been burnt down. The fort itself was still intact, and this was immediately strengthened. But marauders had left the site of the camp covered in débris, while the magistracy safe, which Addison had purposely left open to show that it contained no money, had nevertheless been broken. The money-boxes which Foxon had buried in the ditch

had been unearthed and cut open, while Addison's receipt book, ledger and journal had all been destroyed. It was as if the Zulus, chary of attacking the post when garrisoned by the representatives and armed servants of the Crown, had vented their resentment of the new colonial order by pillaging and destroying its artefacts.

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NOTE ON SOURCES

Information on the battle of Ivuna is scattered throughout private and public collections of documents and contemporary newspapers. It would serve little purpose to enumerate every single source, but a selection of those which have either thrown important light on the subject or which have been extensively consulted are listed below.

Primary sources

In the private collection of R.H. Addison, Esq.:

E.N. Braatvedt & F.M. Braatvedt, *History of Nongoma* and *The Fort at Nongoma* (typed manuscript, 1935);

F. Addison, *The Family of Dr. W.H. Addison* (Pinetown, 1959).

In the Killie Campbell Africana Library:

Mkhwezili Mangele, as told to S.W.J. Mozibuko, *Battle of Nongoma* (entry in Dr Killie Campbell's Essay Competition, 1942).

In the Natal Archives, Pietermaritzburg:

Government House Zululand 712, No. Z377/88: Addison to Osborn, 26 June 1888 — the official report on the battle.

Colenso Collection, Box 106, (Trials of the Zulu Chiefs 1888–9, No. 1):

Dinuzulu's Statement, pp. 33–4; Ndabuko's Further Statement, pp. 8, 21–2.

Colenso Collection, Box 109 (Trials of the Zulu Chiefs 1888–9, No. 4:

Court of the Special Commissioners for Zululand (London, 1889)):

Addison's evidence, pp. 30, 120–1, 356; Foxon's evidence, pp. 159–61, 183–4;

Mansel's evidence, p. 195; Vuzindhlu's evidence, pp. 175, 178;

Matuta's evidence, pp. 262–4, 266; Umhlahlo's evidence, pp. 294–5, 298;

Mbusane's evidence, pp. 255, 258–9; Mhlupeqi's evidence, p. 260–1;

Norris's evidence, p. 245; Roberts's evidence, p. 241.

In the Natal Society Library:

Times of Natal, 7 & 12 July 1888;

Natal Advertiser, 23 July 1888; *Natal Mercury*, 7 July & 6 December 1888.

The diagrammatic reconstruction of the battlefield by Bruno Martin, University of Natal Cartographer, was made possible by relating the extant evidence of those present on the day with the topographical features depicted on the modern Trigonometrical Survey map of Nongoma. Especially useful when attempting to show the exact disposition of the contending forces was the 1906 plan of Nongoma in the Office of the Surveyor-General, for in their testimony veterans still alive in the twentieth century constantly related their narrative to buildings and landmarks then existing in Nongoma. William Cooper's sketch of the fort and its surroundings in the *Court of the Special Commissioners*, p. 238, is of use only in giving the relative positions of the fort and magisterial post. Harriette Colenso's diagram of the battlefield in *Trials of the Zulu Chiefs*, No. 1, p. 21, is positively misleading.

Secondary sources

The earliest secondary account of the battle of Ivuna is by J.Y. Gibson (who succeeded Dick Addison as the Magistrate of Ndwandwe in May 1889), in *The Story of the Zulus* (London, 1911), pp. 307–9. It is based on Addison's report (GHZ 712, No. Z377/88) which was printed in *British Parliamentary Papers* LXXV of 1888 (C. 5522), enc.1 (II) in No. 52: Addison to Osborn, 26 June, 1887. Gibson gives a detailed and imaginative account of the Usuthu night march. There is a brief, but comprehensive, version of the battle, told graphically from a Zulu point of view, and based on accurate oral tradition in M.M. Fuze, *The Black People* (Pietermaritzburg and Durban, 1979), pp. 125–6. H.C. Lugg, *Historic Zululand and Natal* (Pietermaritzburg, 1949), pp. 148, 150, supplies colourful details on Zibhebhu's part in the battle, clearly based on oral evidence. Oliver Walker's short account in *Proud Zulu* (London, 1949), pp. 244–5, casts an heroic glow over the Mandlakazi. The two cursory and very similar descriptions of the battle by T.V. Bulpin in *Shaka's Country* (Cape Town, 1952) p. 210; and in *Natal and the Zulu Country* (Cape Town 1966), pp. 301–2, are both clearly based on Addison's published report in the *B.P.P.*, as is C.T. Binns' in *Dinuzulu: the Death of the House of Shaka* (London, 1968), pp. 126–7.